

Elena Alekseeva, Samara

Stockholm University

Protecting the rights of persons, convicted to imprisonment, in the penal system of Sweden

Stockholm, March-June 2015, December 2015-February 2016

REPORT

I would like to begin my report with the words of gratitude to the board of Sverker Åström Foundation and personally to Disa Håstad for this unforgettable opportunity to plunge into Swedish life that allowed me to extend my professional legal skills and feel as a part of this amazing Scandinavian country.

Since in Sweden I got both professional and cultural experience I would like to divide my report into two parts correspondingly.

1. My Swedish research activity

It is said that no one truly knows a nation until one has been inside its jails. A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens, but its lowest ones

Nelson Mandela

The purpose of my participation in this program was studying the Swedish experience in protecting the rights of prisoners. In particular I focused on researching the protecting the rights to privacy, practice the religion, education, labor, medical care during incarceration, status of pregnant women-prisoners and women with children. I also interested in process of preparation to release. This specific professional interest was caused by my teaching career: before arriving to Sweden I worked as a high school teacher in Samara Law Institute of the Federal Penal Service where the future officers for Russian prisons are trained and where my interest to foreign experience as regards to prisoners' rights arose. Sweden attracted me as an example of Scandinavian model of prison system which is known for its liberal attitude to inmates.

Upon my arriving to Sweden the Stockholm University became my "second home" where I got a personal working place with the access to library and other University's facilities and where I spent a lot of productive time. Here I would like to express my deepest acknowledgement to the professor of criminal law of the Stockholm University Petter Asp from whom I got an invaluable assistance and support as regards to my research through all my staying in Sweden.

Besides working with library and web-resources, my activity in University consisted of meetings with professors of law: Jerzy Sarnecki, Said Mahmoudi, Henrik

Tham with whom I discussed different aspects related to my topic. All of them are excellent specialists and very kind and friendly persons.

In April I provided a seminar for professors of criminal law where I told in detailed about my research.

So if you come to foreign country to study a certain sphere of legal life – rights of prisoners in my case – it is important to get the basic knowledge about national legal system in general. For that purpose I was assigned to the course for foreign students “Swedish Law in Context” and got an opportunity to feel as a student of the Stockholm University. For two months once a week I attended lectures and seminars where I got helpful information about Swedish Constitutional, Criminal, Civil, Family et al. Laws.

University life gave me valuable experience, but a lot of time I also devoted to meetings with people who work in Swedish prison system. So while staying in Stockholm I arranged visiting to the Swedish correctional facilities. The first one was Österåker prison for inmates who need a special treatment, for instance struggling with drug or gambling addiction. I express my deepest gratitude to Mark Tingvall who acquainted me with the basic aspects of functioning of the facility and with the programs which were held there.

Another prison which I attended (fortunately as a researcher) was a prison for women - Färingsö. A very kind and friendly officer Ulla Målquist devoted time to me and told about her work. It was especially helpful for me to learn more about state of affairs regarding the women prisoners with kids.

My special interest was caused by functioning of public organizations which help to ex-prisoners to adjust themselves to real life after release. Among them are KRIS and X-cons organizations. I had meetings with their leaders and here on photo you can see Christer Karlsson – the head of KRIS, and Ali Reunanen.



Among other non-governmental organizations, which activity excited me, was Bufff. People who work there support children whose parents (or one parent) are in prison. And I was pleased to get an opportunity to communicate with persons who fulfill such a noble work.

I had other fruitful meetings in variety of bodies: Head Office of the Swedish Prison and Probation Service in Norrköping; Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention which works to reduce the crimes and improve security level in society; Law Service of Prison and Probation Service; Ombudsmen who deals with claims of prisoners about violations of their rights; training center for prisons' officers, Frivården. Everywhere I faced friendly and attentive attitude and I really grateful for that to all colleagues that I got acquainted in

Sweden. I hope to continue our working relationships upon my return to Samara in framework of conducting scientific events. I've also planned to publish several articles devoted to certain aspects of Swedish prison system and fulfill scientific research comparing the Scandinavian and American prison systems.

Theme weekend travel to the Swedish Prison Museum (Gävle)



2. My Swedish cultural life

Like a roller in the ocean, life is motion, move on
Like a wind that's always blowing, life is flowing, move on
Like the sunrise in the morning, life is dawning, move on
How I treasure every minute, being part of it, being in it
With the urge to move on

ABBA, "Move on"

Here I would like to share my cultural impressions that I got while staying in Sweden. I do not want to talk about popular sightseeing since all guidebooks are full of such kind of information. I just want to give some tips from my own experience which will allow you to feel as a part of Stockholm.

The first recommendation – buy bicycle and use it as your everyday transport. Stockholm is relatively small city and you can reach almost each destination with bike. All the more there are all needed urban conditions for cyclists, including special paths and places for parking.

The second tip: try to avoid touristic places (of course after you've explored them) and visit the sites for "locals". My personal advice is Kristineberg embankment: beautiful place where you can enjoy fantastic summer sunsets sitting on wooden platform.

The third advice: try to speak Swedish, at least at elementary level. Probably for the first time you will consider this language as a group of unclear sounds, but after a while you will realize that Swedish has its own specific melody and it is not so difficult to use simple phrases at shops, cafes, buses etc. Though Swedish is not related to Slavic group of languages, keep in mind that some words can confuse you. For instance, if you see an inscription "Bio" on a building, it doesn't refer to biological or biochemical facility. "Bio"

means a cinema theatre. Or if a Swede told you he was on semester it didn't mean he studied in University. "Semester" on Swedish means "leave". "Sambo" is not a type of combat sport and even not related to samba-dance. It is a marriage that has not been officially registered.

Talking about dive into Swedish mode of life, special attention I would like to pay to the different kinds of events, organized by Disa and her friends, where we were kindly invited to. Among them were tea parties, dinners where we got acquainted with a lot of interesting and famous people in the spheres of politics, journalism, art, law etc. It is worth to mention the unusual and pleasant experience for me to celebrate absolutely Russian tradition, Old New Year, among Swedes with olivie and champagne. And, of course, eventful Easter holidays with attending the Täby church, Härkeberga, Gripsholm castle, Sigtuna:

Gripsholm Castle



Painting eggs



Sverker Åström's sculpture at Gripsholm



Hospitable Disa's dacha in Stockholm's archipelago is picturesque in any season:



It is very hard to describe all the events that I attended during my staying in Stockholm, but naming the most memorable ones I would like to mention the celebration of Sverker Åström's 100 years in Nobel Museum with his friends and colleagues, the Nobel lecture of Svetlana Aleksievich – Nobel Prize laureate in literature, awarding the Prize "Civil Rights Defender".

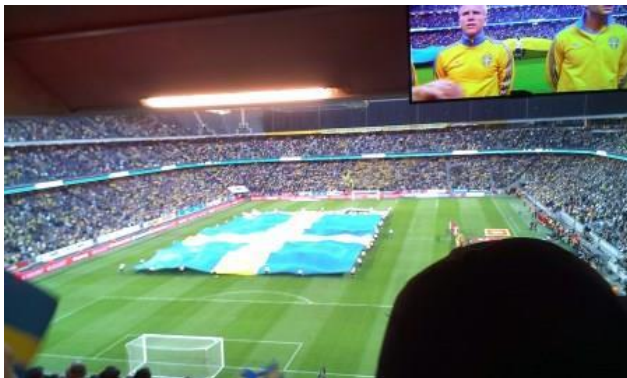
Now some words about activities outside Swedish capital. Stockholm is a nice start point for one-day trips. One can spend the weekend travelling by ship through the Stockholm archipelago, as I did, e.g. Vaxholm is a very popular destination. Or visit towns which are situated not far from capital. In my case it was Uppsala, Westeros, Eskilstuna, Gävle, Norrköpping. Östersund is located pretty far from Stockholm, on the north of the country, but it was in my "wish list" since I am fond of biathlon and dreamed to attend competitions during the Biathlon World Cup stage in December.

Dreams come true. Östersund. December.

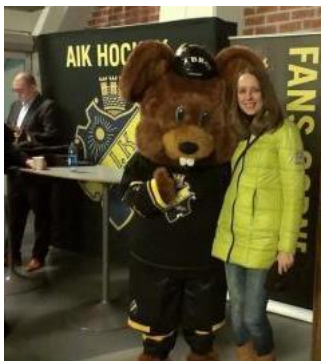


By mentioning Östersund, I've moved smoothly to sport topic. For many years I have been a football fan and in Sweden I was pretty lucky to observe some of my idols by my own eyes:

Zlatan Ibrahimović (believe me, he is somewhere on the field). Sweden-Montenegro. June, 14. Friends Arena. Stockholm.



Henrik Larsson, football player of Swedish national team and some of Swedish football clubs. Now is a coach of Helsingborg club.



In Sweden I not only had a good fortune to observe the sportsmen I had known before, but became a fan of Stockholm's sport club AIK – both football and ice-hockey (Disa did not approve my choice since she supported another Stockholm's club – Djurgården).



Since I stayed in Sweden for 6 months I was fortunate to see many "faces" of Stockholm:

Spring face with unforgettable blooming cherry



Summer face (in the middle – the wedding of Prince Karl Phillippe)



Winter face with amazing Christmas decoration



Hope to refill my collection of Stockholm's faces with the autumn one.

Last, but not least, I really appreciate that friendly attitude that I faced while staying in Sweden. And I met it not only in framework of my research. I got acquainted with a lot of kind people who allowed me to become closer to Swedish life. Among them are Gunnar Johansson – thanks to you and your wife for warm welcome, Inger Liljefors – thank you for useful assistance and for our coffee meetings, Lotta Silfverhielm – thank you for exciting excursion to Långholmen.

With deepest gratitude and hope to see again all the people that I got acquainted with during my never-to-be-forgotten staying in Sweden.

Alekseeva Elena
Samara, February, 2016.